

Chapter 8

Parks, Recreation and Open Space Element





Parks, Recreation and Open Space

Overview 800

THIS ELEMENT ADDRESSES THE FUTURE OF PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN space in the District of Columbia. It recognizes the important role parks play in recreation, aesthetics, neighborhood character, and environmental quality. It includes policies on related topics such as recreational facility development, the use of private open space, and the creation of trails to better connect the city's open spaces and neighborhoods. 800.1

The critical parks, recreation and open space issues facing the District of Columbia are addressed in this Element. These include:

- Coordination between the District of Columbia and the federal government on park and open space planning and management
- Providing additional recreational land and facilities in areas of the city that are currently underserved and in newly developing areas
- Maintaining, upgrading, and improving existing parks and recreation facilities as key features of successful neighborhoods in the District. 800.2

The District has benefited from a legacy of far-sighted master plans that recognized the importance of parks and open space to the future of the city. The McMillan Plan of 1901 was prepared in part to beautify and better organize the District's open spaces—the National Mall and Rock Creek Park that we know today are among its legacies. Many of the early plans prepared by the National Capital Parks and Planning Commission placed a similar emphasis on improving the city's open spaces and parkways. 800.3

These historic plans have resulted in 7,600 acres of permanent open space and parkland in the District of Columbia, and one of the highest ratios of park acreage per resident in the country. Nonetheless, when the District achieved Home Rule and set about developing its first Comprehensive Plan, a “park and open space element” was not included. This responsibility was left to the federal government, primarily because over 85 percent of the District's parkland is managed by the National Park Service (NPS) and is not under the city's jurisdiction¹. 800.4

Many of the policies within this Element express the District's perspectives on the federally-owned parks that serve city residents. While the District has limited jurisdiction over these parks, the Comprehensive Plan acknowledges and supports the essential role that these lands play in meeting the recreational needs of District of Columbia residents, employees, and visitors. 800.5

¹ Policies for the Park Service lands are contained in individual General Management Plans prepared by the NPS, and are also included in the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan. There have also been several joint District/Federal park planning initiatives launched since the 1960s.

The overarching goal for parks, recreation and open space is:

Preserve and enhance parks and open spaces within the District of Columbia to meet active and passive recreational needs, improve environmental quality, enhance the identity and character of District neighborhoods, and provide visual beauty in all parts of the national capital. 801.1

Including a chapter on parks, recreation, and open space in the District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan is important for a number of reasons:

- First, the District itself owns over 900 acres of parkland and there is a need for a coordinated set of policies for their management.
- Second, access to quality parks and open space is a top priority for District residents—regardless of who owns the land. The fact that most of the city's open space is federally controlled suggests that joint policy planning for these assets is essential.
- Third, the city is changing, which means recreational needs also are changing. Policies are needed to make sure that new park and recreational opportunities are provided and existing parks are improved to meet the needs of a changing and expanding population. 800.6

The Comprehensive Plan is supplemented by a more detailed Parks Master Plan prepared by the District Department of Parks and Recreation in 2005-2006. That document should be consulted for more detailed guidance on facilities, recreational programming, and direction for specific District parks. Key data from the Parks Master Plan, including “benchmarking” data that compares the District to peer cities and the findings of a 2005 resident survey, are cited in this Element to provide context for the policies and actions. 800.7

Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Goal 801

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Policies and Actions

PROS-1 Park Planning and Land Management 802

This section of the Element focuses on parks that are owned and operated by the District of Columbia. Policies also express the District’s perspectives on the federally-owned parks that serve city residents. 802.1

The Parks Master Plan ⁸⁰³



In 2006, the District Department of Parks and Recreation drafted its first Comprehensive Master Plan since its establishment in 1942. Over the past 60 years, aspects of the park system have been addressed in strategic plans and other District reports, but there has been no overarching guide.

The Draft Parks Master Plan sets the stage for a new and exciting future for park and recreation services and facilities in Washington. It provides strategic direction to address the public's core issues and is intended to improve park management and operations in the city. It includes a detailed assessment of recreational needs in each of the District's 39 neighborhood clusters, along with an assessment of the facilities serving each cluster. These assessments are intended to serve as tools for prioritizing future capital improvement projects.

Specific outcomes of the Draft Parks Master Plan include:

- New service standards for parks, recreational programs, and facilities
- Comprehensive information on the recreational needs of DC residents
- Projections of expected future needs, based on growth and demographics
- Information on customer usage and satisfaction
- Identification of current and potential shortfalls
- Strategies for overcoming shortfalls, including land acquisition and programming changes.

The Draft Parks Master Plan includes seven strategic policy directives to guide park planning and programming during the coming years. These directives call for an enhanced identity for the District's park system, new programs to serve a diverse community, improvements to facility condition, better communication, more effective financial management, improved partnerships, and greater accessibility and connectivity. It also includes specific action steps and priorities for implementing these directives.



“Redesign the parks to include safe play areas, gardens and separate exercise areas as well as seating areas. Look in all areas of the city for this opportunity.”

— SUGGESTION FROM
A PARTICIPANT IN A
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
MEETING.

The District manages an inventory of 359 properties, comprising 917 acres. More than two-thirds of these properties are small open space triangles formed by the intersection of diagonal avenues and the city street grid. The remainder includes 69 recreation center grounds, 50 neighborhood parks, and four large natural areas. ^{802.2}

For planning purposes, park activities are usually divided into two categories: active recreation and passive recreation. Active recreation is associated with sports or play activities and requires facilities such as playgrounds, ballfields, tennis courts, and swimming pools. Passive recreation emphasizes the open space aspect of a park and includes activities like hiking and picnicking. In Washington, the presence of District-owned parks and National Parks provides a unique blend of active and passive recreational opportunities. ^{802.3}

PROS-1.1 Developing a Park Classification System ⁸⁰⁴

Most large cities in the United States have adopted classification systems to guide the management of their parks and open spaces. In fact, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) defines park classification as “the basic element of the planning function.” Classification provides a basis for deciding which activities and facilities are appropriate within each park. It also provides a means of analyzing where service gaps exist and where acquisitions and capital improvements may be required. ^{804.1}

Until 2006, the District’s parks were loosely classified as “large parks,” “neighborhood parks,” “recreation center grounds,” and “triangles.” These categories are not consistent with national standards, making it difficult to evaluate the adequacy of parks or to compare the District with peer cities. They are also not intuitive—the “large parks” are actually ecological areas (like Watts Branch and Kingman Island); some recreation centers have no “grounds” to speak of; and the “neighborhood parks” category includes no acreage, service area, or facility standards. ^{804.2}

The 2006 Parks Master Plan has recommended a new classification system to improve customer service and park management. Under this system, the four “Large Parks” (Oxon Run, Watts Branch, Pope Branch, and Kingman/Heritage Islands) will be re-categorized into a broader category of conservation-oriented open spaces. Recreation center grounds and neighborhood parks will be reclassified as “community” or “neighborhood” parks based on their size and amenities. The 231 triangles will be classified as “mini parks” and will be further distinguished based on their size and function. ^{804.3}

Table 8.1 summarizes the park classification system. Map 8.1 shows the location of District-owned parks. The mini-parks are not shown due to the map scale and small size of these parks. ^{804.4}

Table 8.1:

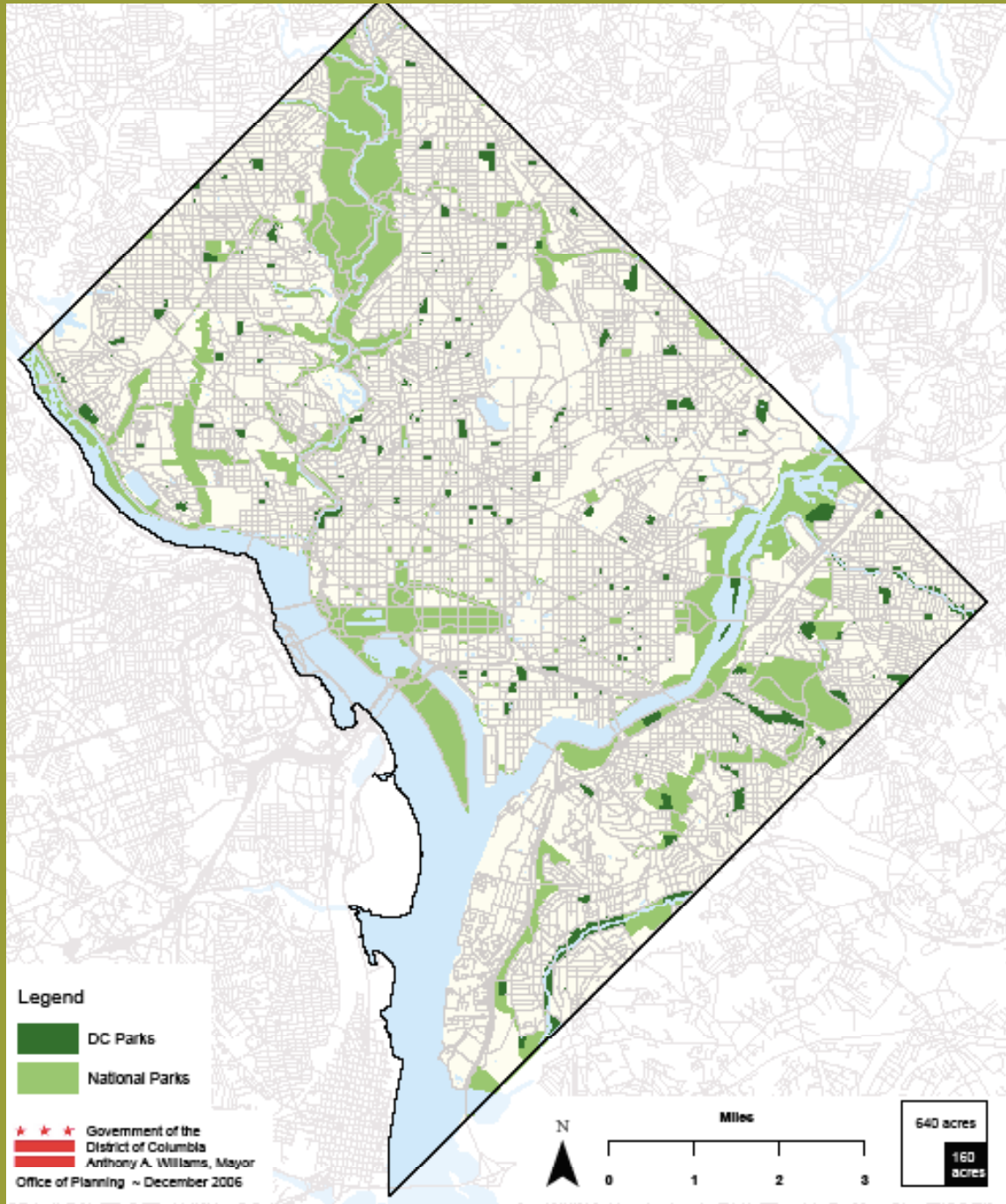
Park Classification System 804.5

Park Type	Description	Typical Uses	Service Area*
Mini-Park	Pocket parks or triangles. Range from landscaped “islands” to places for socializing, playing chess, etc.	Benches, seating areas, public art, landscaping	¼ mile radius
Neighborhood	Provide informal centrally located setting for neighborhood-based recreational amenities, possibly including recreation centers.	Playgrounds, tot lots, basketball courts, open lawn areas for unstructured play, seating and picnic areas, community gardens, and interpretive or educational exhibits	½-mile radius
Community	Larger parks with more structured recreational opportunities, including recreation center buildings with a range of DPR programs.	Active play-oriented outdoor facilities such as ball fields, athletic courts, playgrounds, indoor and outdoor swim facilities, natural amenities such as trails, natural areas, and picnic grounds	1-2 mile radius, with connections to bike and pedestrian trail networks
Regional	Large multi-use parks that draw users citywide or from beyond adjacent neighborhoods.	Very large areas of open space, recreation centers, lighted athletic fields, group picnic areas, hiking, multiple activity areas	Citywide
Natural Resource Areas	Parks established to conserve open space and sensitive natural resources or heritage assets. If adjoined by open, level areas, then recreational fields and play areas may be appropriate.	Low-impact passive activities such as hiking and environmental education	N/A—not demand-driven
Sports Complexes	Programmed athletic fields and multi-use indoor complexes, custom designed for specific programmed uses.	Track and field, natatorium, softball, soccer, tennis, basketball, volleyball, racquetball, football, boxing, martial arts	Citywide
Special Use	Parks dedicated to a single use such as a zoo or amphitheater. Accommodate highly organized activities and provide economic as well as social and physical benefits. May have highly specialized management requirements.	Golf courses, aquatic or spray parks, sculpture parks, dog parks, arboretums, historic homes, amphitheaters, skate parks, climbing centers	Citywide
School Parks	Public land on school property developed with playgrounds and open fields, designed for student activities but also available for community use.	Running tracks, playgrounds, athletic fields, basketball courts	½ mile to 2 mile radius
Trails and Bikeways	Hard or soft paved paths providing linkages within or between parks, facilitating access and exploration.	Paved or dirt trails, boardwalks, promenades	½ to ¼ mile to access point

* Some parks are nationally significant and serve an area larger than the City of Washington.

Map 8.1:

Location of District Parks 804.6



An important consideration in classifying the city's parks is to recognize the role that federal lands play in the overall park system (noted in Policy PROS 1.1.2 below). In many parts of the city, federal land plays a crucial role in meeting park, recreation, and open space needs. Some of the city's parks are part of a contiguous system of parks and open spaces, with different areas under different ownership and management. Such systems need to be cohesively planned and managed, and not treated as individual isolated neighborhood or community parks. ^{804.7}

Policy PROS-1.1.1: Park Classification

Adopt and maintain a classification system to guide the future use of District parks. Table 8.1 provides the framework for this system. Follow general management prescriptions for each type of park, as defined by an official Parks Master Plan. ^{804.8}

Policy PROS-1.1.2: Consideration of Federal Parkland

Work with federal agencies to evaluate the role that federal lands play in meeting the recreational needs of District residents, particularly for regional parks and sports complexes. Because these properties are used by city residents, they should be considered when identifying underserved areas and assessing the need for local park improvements. ^{804.9}

Policy PROS-1.1.3: Park Diversity

Provide a diverse range of recreational experiences in parks within the District of Columbia, including a balance between passive and active recreational uses, and a mix of local-serving, region-serving, and national recreational uses. ^{804.10}

Action PROS-1.1.A: Park Classification

Complete the classification of each of the District's 359 properties using Table 8.1. Identify suggested (advisory only) classifications for federal parks as part of this process. ^{804.11}

Action PROS-1.1.B: Parks Master Plan

Implement the Master Plan for the District of Columbia Parks System. Update the Plan at least once every five years, or as needed to reflect changing conditions and needs. Use the Parks Master Plan as the basis for the annual capital improvements program request for park and recreational facilities. ^{804.12}

Action PROS-1.1.C: Master Plans for Individual Parks

Prepare master plans for individual parks as funding allows, and implement capital improvements that are consistent with these plans. ^{804.13}

Most of Washington's parkland consists of passive Natural Resource Areas. Neighborhood and community parkland is much more limited and amounts to less than one acre per 1,000 residents in many parts of the city.

PROS-1.2 Closing the Gaps ⁸⁰⁵

At first glance, the District of Columbia appears to have a more than adequate supply of parkland. There are 12.9 acres of parks per 1,000 residents, compared to 9.0 acres per 1,000 in Baltimore; 7.2 acres per 1,000 in Philadelphia; and 7.0 acres per 1,000 in Boston (Trust for Public Land, 2004). However, most of Washington's parkland consists of passive Natural Resource Areas. Neighborhood and community parkland is much more limited and amounts to less than one acre per 1,000 residents in many parts of the city. By contrast, suburban communities typically set standards of 4 or 5 acres of active parkland per 1,000 residents. ^{805.1}

Even neighborhoods with abundant parkland may lack access to recreational amenities and facilities. Other neighborhoods have parks that are too small to meet local needs. These neighborhoods include areas where significant growth is taking place, straining the ability of the facilities to meet neighborhood needs. Improved access to parks is also needed through improvements to bus service, enhancement to pedestrian and bicycle routes, as well as better security. ^{805.2}

Recreational needs are also a function of demographics and density. The need for parks may be more critical in some areas of the city due to:

- Limited mobility due to low rates of auto ownership
- Larger numbers of children
- Larger numbers of apartment dwellers living in housing without useable open space
- Denser development patterns without the aesthetic amenities afforded by open space
- Larger concentrations of "at-risk" youth who may benefit from programmed recreational activities. ^{805.3}

These factors suggest that special attention be given to increasing useable open space in the city's densest neighborhoods, even where parks already exist. ^{805.4}

Policy PROS-1.2.1: Closing the Gaps

Achieve a better distribution of parks in all neighborhoods of the city. This will require a priority on improving or expanding parks in: (a) more densely populated neighborhoods with limited open space; (b) areas that are more than ½ mile from a neighborhood or community park (or a federal park that serves an equivalent function); (c) areas where substantial new housing growth is expected, based on the forecasts of the Comprehensive Plan; and (d) areas where the existing recreation centers and parks are in poor condition. ^{805.5}

Policy PROS-1.2.2: Improving Access

Improve access to the major park and open space areas within the city through pedestrian safety and street crossing improvements, bike lanes and storage areas, and adjustments to bus routes. ^{805.6}

Policy PROS-1.2.3: Responding To Community Change

Update and improve existing parks in response to changing demographics, cultural norms, and community needs and preferences. Parks should reflect the identity and needs of the communities they serve. ^{805.7}

Action PROS-1.2.A: Bus Routing

Consult with WMATA to locate more bus stops on neighborhood and community parks, particularly those with recreation centers. Currently only 28 percent of the city's recreation centers have a bus stop; the District has set a target of increasing this percentage to 50 percent by 2014. ^{805.8}

Action PROS-1.2.B: Public Involvement

Consult with ANC's and local community groups on park planning and development to understand and better address resident priorities. ^{805.9}

PROS-1.3 Protecting the Value of Parkland ⁸⁰⁶

A park can be a symbol of a neighborhood's vitality and character, or an emblem of its disorganization and lack of spirit. Too often, our parks have not been treated as the resource for revitalization and community empowerment that they should be. Some suffer from deferred maintenance, illegal dumping, and crime—others struggle to accommodate competing needs within limited space. A lack of consistent policies on park management has led to use conflicts within some parks and in some cases, land use conflicts between parks and the neighborhoods around them. ^{806.1}

Washington's parks should be viewed as a limited and precious resource, no less valuable than the neighborhoods they serve. This requires that a consistent set of principles be followed for park design, programming, and planning. The following policies provide guidelines for systematically managing the District's parks to protect their long-term value. They are supplemented by more detailed park management guidelines in the Parks Master Plan. ^{806.2}

Policy PROS-1.3.1: Balancing Competing Needs

Manage the District's parklands to protect and enhance their open space character while also accommodating a range of recreational activities. Park activities and facilities should be designed in a way that makes the best possible use of each space while minimizing conflicts between different recreational uses. ^{806.3}

Policy PROS-1.3.2: Parks and Environmental Objectives

Use park improvements to achieve environmental objectives such as water quality improvement, air quality improvement, and wildlife habitat restoration. ^{806.4}

A park can be a symbol of a neighborhood's vitality and character, or an emblem of its disorganization and lack of spirit. Too often, our parks have not been treated as the resource for revitalization and community empowerment that they should be.



“Make bigger parks truly useable, safe, and attractive, for residents.”

— PARTICIPANT AT A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN WORKSHOP

Policy PROS-1.3.3: Protecting the Triangle Parks

Maintain the District’s open space triangles as neighborhood amenities supporting a range of activities. These activities should vary based on the setting of each triangle, and should range from planted “islands” to more active spaces. The triangles should be designed in a way that mitigates stormwater runoff and air pollution from adjacent corridors. ^{806.5}

Policy PROS-1.3.4: Conversion of Parkland/Open Space

Protect the basic function of District parks as public open spaces and prevent parkland conversion to other uses. In the event that there is no other viable alternative to conversion, require that an equivalent or greater area of parkland is acquired and improved in the vicinity of the impacted site. ^{806.6}

Policy PROS-1.3.5: Park Buildings

Require any new structure on District-owned parkland to be sited to minimize impacts on existing recreational activities and facilities, avoid encroachment onto athletic fields, and to retain as much of the site as possible as useable open space. Public buildings that do not relate to recreational needs should be discouraged from locating on city parkland, especially in areas with parkland deficiencies. ^{806.7}

Policy PROS-1.3.6: Compatibility with Adjacent Development

Design and manage park activities and facilities including recreation centers in a way that is compatible with nearby residential and commercial uses. ^{806.8}

See also the Historic Preservation and the Urban Design Elements for additional policies and actions related to historic natural areas and the squares, circles and triangles associated with the L’Enfant Plan. See the Infrastructure Element for policies on the siting of communication towers (in parks and elsewhere).

Action PROS-1.3.A: Open Space Zone

Establish an Open Space zone district to cover District-owned parks, community gardens, and other lands where long-term open space preservation is desired. Develop limits on lot coverage and impervious surface coverage in this zone that recognize and protect the basic value of parkland as open space. The zoning provisions should ensure that any future construction within parks is limited to park-related uses and facilities. ^{806.9}

Action PROS-1.3.B: Transfer of Triangles to DPR

Consider the transfer of maintenance responsibilities for triangle parks from the District Department of Transportation to the Department of Parks and Recreation to recognize their primary function as parkland. ^{806.10}

See also the Environmental Protection Element for policies related to preventing development on land adjacent to parks that would hinder access, destroy views, or otherwise compromise the value of parkland.

Action PROS-1.3.C: Site Plan Review

Require that plans for the redesign of individual parks or the development of park facilities are reviewed by appropriate District agencies to ensure that they advance the city's goals for better public recreation facilities, environmental protection, open space preservation, historic preservation, public safety, and accessibility. ^{806.11}

PROS-1.4 Meeting the Needs of a Growing City ⁸⁰⁷

The addition of thousands of new jobs and households over the next 20 years will increase demand for programmed parks, open space, and recreational activities. Existing parks will accommodate more users, particularly in neighborhoods where high-density infill development is planned. New parks will be needed to serve new and growing communities. Given the built out character of the city, finding land for such parks will be difficult and expensive. The District must seize opportunities for parkland dedication on its largest redevelopment sites and take steps now to ensure that parks are provided elsewhere as the city grows. ^{807.1}

Presently, the District Department of Parks and Recreation operates approximately 3.5 acres of parkland for every 1,000 households in the city. If 55,000 households are added in the next 20 years, almost 200 acres of new parkland would be needed to sustain this ratio. The 100 acres of new parks planned at the Southwest Waterfront, the near Southeast, Poplar Point, Hill East, and elsewhere along the Anacostia River will meet some of this demand. Additional parkland will be needed to serve growth and development in the north central and northeastern parts of the city, where a substantial amount of additional housing is planned in an area with a dearth of public parks. Substantial areas for new parks should also be designated in the reuse plans for any large federal sites that are transferred to the District or used for private development in the future. ^{807.2}

Creating new parks in built-up neighborhoods will be more challenging. There is competing pressure to use public land for other purposes, particularly revenue-generating uses like housing and office development. The city does not have a dedicated funding source for parkland acquisition (such as an impact fee) and capital improvement funds are typically used for new facilities rather than to buy vacant land. Acquisition may occur through a variety of means, such as donations and grants. Open space may also be set aside within new projects through development agreements and planned unit development amenity packages. Such open space should be usable and accessible and address open space needs of the area. ^{807.3}

Policy PROS-1.4.1: Park Acquisition

Acquire and improve additional parkland to meet the recreational needs of existing and future residents. This should occur both through the expansion of existing parks, and the development of new parks. ^{807.4}

Policy PROS-1.4.2: Acquisition Methods

Use a variety of methods to acquire and improve parkland, including easements, donations, land purchases, and park set-asides on new development sites. Recognize the impacts of new development on the need for additional park and recreational facilities, and mitigate impacts through dedication of parkland or in-lieu payments. ^{807.5}

Policy PROS-1.4.3: Parks on Large Sites

Include new neighborhood and/or community parks on large sites that are redeveloped for housing and other uses that generate a demand for recreational services. The potential for such parks to enhance the connectivity of parks and open spaces throughout the city should be an important planning and design consideration, particularly where multiple large adjacent sites are being redeveloped. ^{807.6}

Policy PROS-1.4.4: Parks on Surplus Land

Acquire and convert abandoned or tax delinquent land, surplus rail or road rights of way, and other land not in productive use into recreational use where feasible and appropriate, particularly in parts of the city that lack adequate access to parkland. ^{807.7}

Policy PROS-1.4.5: Park Amenities on NPS Land

Where consistent with other policies in the Comprehensive Plan and NPS plans, and where supported by nearby neighborhoods and needs assessments, encourage federal government projects that would provide new recreational amenities such as soccer fields, picnic areas, and trails serving District residents on national parkland. ^{807.8}

Policy PROS-1.4.6: Parks in Employment Growth Areas

Provide new parks and open spaces in areas of expected employment growth. Small pocket parks, plazas, and other open spaces should be created in the vicinity of the New York Avenue Metro Station, the Southeast Federal Center, the east end of Downtown, and the South Capitol Street Corridor to provide visual relief and space for outdoor seating and passive recreation. ^{807.9}

Action PROS-1.4.A: Park Impact Fee

Study the feasibility (including potential fiscal and economic effects) of adopting a park impact fee that would require residential developers to help cover the cost of parkland acquisition and improvement. Such a fee would be based on a standard amount per dwelling unit or square foot, with the

proceeds used to acquire or improve nearby parkland. ^{807.10}

Action PROS-1.4.B: Mixed Use Zones

As part of the review of the city's zoning regulations, revise the provisions for mixed use zones to consider requirements for useable recreation space or payments in-lieu to meet recreational needs. ^{807.11}

See also the Educational Facilities Element for policies on the use of school recreational facilities and lands.

PROS-2 Park and Recreational Facilities ⁸⁰⁸

While the previous section of this Element focused on park planning, this section focuses specifically on park facilities. ^{808.1}

The District currently operates 69 recreation centers, four specialty recreational facilities, 74 playgrounds, 99 athletic fields, 138 tennis courts, 31 swimming pools, and hundreds of basketball courts. These facilities are used to provide recreational services to residents in all parts of the city. Department of Parks and Recreation activities range from aquatics, quilting, and environmental education to martial arts, personalized weight training, and even poetry slams. Many of the programs are targeted toward specific age groups, such as seniors and teens. Others are designed for persons with special needs or for families. ^{808.2}

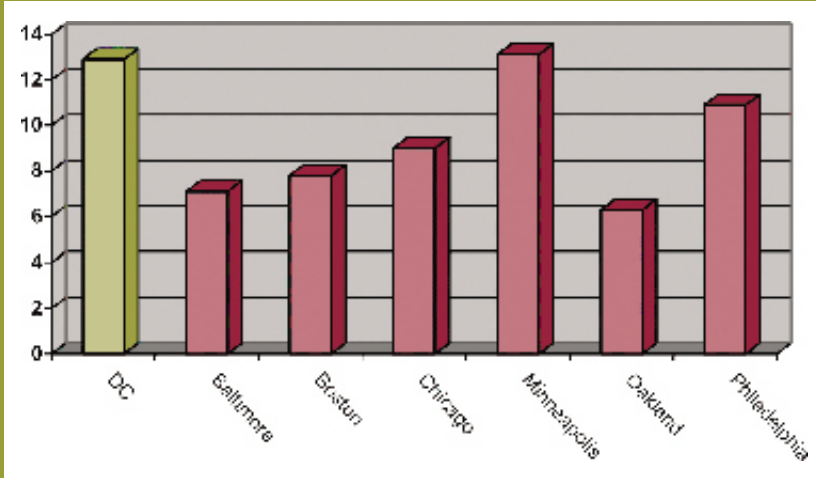
Demand for recreational programs—and the facilities that accommodate them—is expected to grow in the future as population grows. Demand will also be affected by cultural changes, new technology, sports and entertainment trends, and demographic shifts. The growth of the senior population, in particular, will influence future recreational needs in the city over the next 20 years. The text box to the right provides an indication of current recreational habits and trends in the city, based on a 2005 resident survey. ^{808.3}

The 2005 Parks Survey ^{808.4}

One of the outcomes of the city's 2006 Parks Master Plan was a resident survey that assessed the demand for recreational facilities in the city. A total of 421 responses were tabulated, including representative samples from each of the city's eight wards. Key findings were:

- 61 percent of the respondents had visited a DPR park in the last 12 months; 46 percent had visited a recreation center.
- 37 percent of the respondents rated the condition of DPR parks as good or excellent; 46 percent rated them as fair or poor.
- Half of the respondents (50%) indicated they use the city's National Parks for recreation.
- 17 percent of the respondents spent more than 8 hours a week on recreation activities.
- The most popular recreational activities were walking/jogging (43%), playground use (23%), swimming (24%), and picnicking (23%).
- About 56 percent of respondents indicated they walked to their local park; however, even more respondents said they drove (68%).
- Only about 16 percent of the respondents indicated they had participated in a DPR program during the last 12 months. The reasons residents gave for not participating included lack of information (36%), lack of time (18%), and concerns about personal safety (16%).
- The highest priority expressed by respondents was the maintenance of existing parks, fields, and playgrounds. Maintenance of recreation centers was also a top priority. Lower priorities were the development of new play fields, new recreation centers, and small neighborhood parks.

Figure 8.1:
Recreation Centers per 1,000 Residents ^{809.2}



Source: OP, 2006

PROS-2.1 Assessing Recreational Facilities ⁸⁰⁹

Benchmarks provide a means of measuring the adequacy of the District's recreational facilities based on "peer cities" and national standards. For example, Figure 8.1 indicates that the District has a higher number of recreation centers per 1,000 residents than Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, or Philadelphia. Similar analysis conducted during the Parks Master Plan found that the District ranked close to its "peer" cities in its number of swimming pools, was above average in tennis courts, and was well below average in athletic fields.

These are citywide benchmarks,

however. They also pertain to the quantity of facilities, rather to facility condition or quality. ^{809.1}

Map 8.2 (page 8-15) shows the location of recreation center buildings in the city. The Map also shows a one-half mile radius—or about a ten-minute walk—around each center. Service gaps appear in neighborhoods like Fairlawn, Deanwood, Forest Hills, and Shepherd Park. Similar analyses for recreational facilities indicate a need for more athletic fields in the central part of the city, swimming pools in Upper Northwest, and tennis courts in the Mid-City and Capitol Hill areas. ^{809.3}

The policies below provide general direction on how existing facility gaps might be closed and how new facilities can be provided to meet future needs. Again, the Parks Master Plan provides more detail on these issues and should be consulted for additional guidance and programmatic recommendations. ^{809.4}

Policy PROS-2.1.1: Recreational Facility Development

Improve the physical and psychological health of District residents by providing a variety of recreational and athletic facilities, including playing fields, tennis courts, swimming pools, basketball courts, trails and paths, and open areas for other sports activities. ^{809.5}

Policy PROS-2.1.2: Use of Benchmarks and Standards

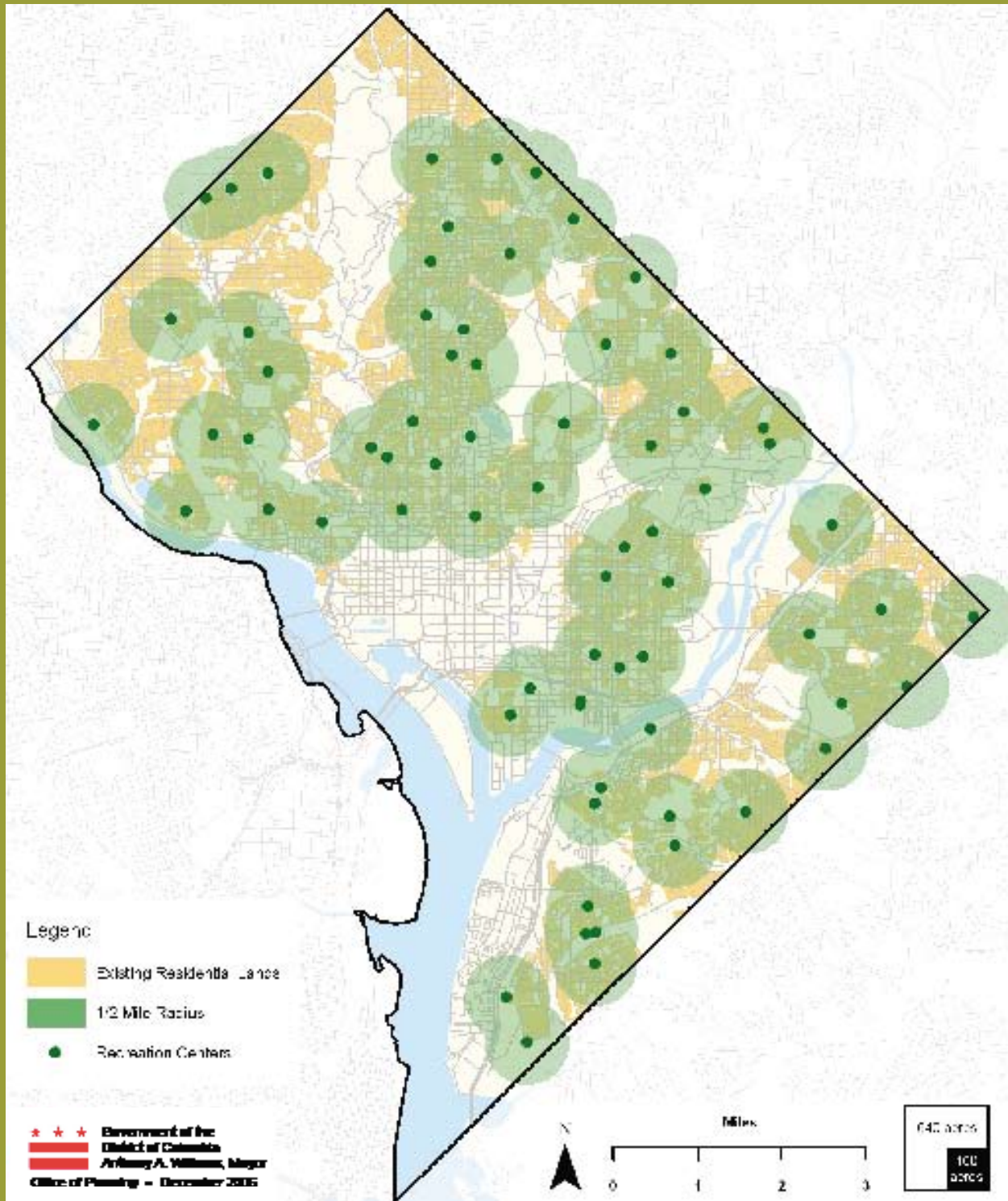
Develop recreational facilities in an orderly way by using benchmarks and service standards that help identify local needs. Direct investment

The District has a higher number of recreation centers per 1,000 residents than Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, or Philadelphia. It also ranked close to its "peer" cities in its number of swimming pools, was above average in tennis courts, and was well below average in athletic fields.

Map 8.2:

Recreation Center Buildings and Potential Service Area Gaps

809.6



in new facilities to the areas with the greatest unmet needs and areas where additional demand is expected in the future. ^{809.7}

Policy PROS-2.1.3: Quality and Compatible Design

Require all park improvements to be of high design and construction quality, sensitive to the natural environment, and compatible with surrounding land uses. ^{809.8}

Policy PROS-2.1.4: Responding to Local Preferences

Provide amenities and facilities in District parks that are responsive to the preferences and needs of the neighborhoods around the parks. Park planning should recognize that there are different leisure time interests in different parts of the city. To better understand these differences, the community must be involved in key planning and design decisions. ^{809.9}

Policy PROS-2.1.5: Adapting to Changing Needs

Allow the development of facilities which respond to changing preferences and community needs in appropriate District parks, including fenced dog exercise areas (dog parks), skate parks, tot lots, and water spray parks. ^{809.10}

Action PROS-2.1.A: Capital Improvements

Provide systematic and continuing funds for park improvements through the annual Capital Improvement Program. Use the Parks Master Plan as a guide for directing funds to the facilities and communities that are most in need. ^{809.11}

Action PROS-2.1.B: Needs Assessments and Demographic Analysis

Conduct periodic needs assessments, surveys, and demographic studies to better understand the current preferences and future needs of District residents with respect to parks and recreation. ^{809.12}

See also the Community Services and Facilities Element for policies on the co-location of recreational uses with other public facilities.

PROS-2.2 Providing Quality Service to All Residents ⁸¹⁰

Maintaining a quality park system requires a high level of facility maintenance, modernization, and repair. An analysis prepared as part of the Parks Master Plan estimated that more than half of the District's recreation centers are in fair to poor condition and should be considered for replacement by 2014. This includes the 25 recreation centers in the city that are more than 50 years old. ^{810.1}

On a per capita basis, the District spends less on maintenance than peer cities like Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, and Minneapolis. Since 2003, however, its annual expenditures on park capital improvements have been higher than these cities. New facilities like Kennedy, Emery, Sherwood, and

Turkey Thicket are replacing aging buildings and providing attractive new community centers. With more capital construction planned in the coming years, the District will need to dedicate additional funds to cover the higher expenses of operating and maintaining these facilities. ^{810.2}

Similar efforts will be needed to address a wide variety of park planning issues, including the personal safety of park visitors, provisions for at-risk youth and residents with special needs, staffing needs, and the coordination of service delivery with other agencies. A steady, reliable stream of funds will be essential to keep our parks safe and attractive, and to respond to future needs. ^{810.3}

Looking ahead, new funding sources such as public/private partnerships, grants, and concessions may be necessary. A commitment to future funding should recognize the many tangible and intangible benefits that Washington's parks provide to our neighborhoods. ^{810.4}

Policy PROS-2.2.1: Maintenance and Renovation

Provide for the continuing maintenance, renovation, and upgrading of the District's parks and recreational facilities to prevent their deterioration and ensure that they continue to meet community needs. ^{810.5}

Policy PROS-2.2.2: Park Safety and Security

Design parks, trails, and recreational facilities to improve public safety. Avoid creating hidden and difficult to access areas where security problems or vandalism could result. Lighting, fencing, building materials, and other design components should be selected to enhance the safety of park users. Park lighting shall be compatible with adjacent residential neighborhoods. ^{810.6}

Policy PROS-2.2.3: Program Diversity

Provide diverse recreational activities for persons of all ages and cultural backgrounds, distributed equitably in all parts of the city. Coordinate with other service providers, including DC Public Schools, to maximize the effectiveness of service delivery and minimize redundancy. ^{810.7}

Policy PROS-2.2.4: Youth Recreational Services

Provide recreational services that are particularly responsive to the special needs of the District's youth, using recreation and athletics to promote self-esteem, responsibility, and leadership skills among DC teens. ^{810.8}

Policy PROS-2.2.5: Special Needs

Increase efforts to meet the needs of special population groups, particularly persons with disabilities. Provide "barrier free" access by modifying existing facilities to accommodate the needs of the disabled. ^{810.9}



A steady, reliable stream of funds will be essential to keep our parks safe and attractive, and to respond to future needs.



Encourage volunteer assistance and stewardship in the maintenance of the District's parks. Local community organizations should be encouraged to donate goods, services, and time to help in the oversight and upkeep of such spaces.

Policy PROS-2.2.6: New Funding Sources

Seek out and pursue new forms of federal, non-profit, and private financial support to acquire, develop, and operate the District's park and recreational facilities. ^{810.10}

Policy PROS-2.2.7: Public-Private Partnerships for Recreation

Consider joint public-private financing to develop or rehabilitate recreational facilities that cannot be provided by District government alone due to budgetary or fiscal constraints. ^{810.11}

Policy PROS-2.2.8: Park Stewardship

Encourage volunteer assistance and stewardship in the maintenance of the District's parks, particularly the triangle parks along major thoroughfares. Local community organizations should be encouraged to donate goods, services, and time to help in the oversight and upkeep of such spaces. ^{810.12}

Policy PROS-2.2.9: User Fees

Establish user fees and charges for recreational programs as needed to partially recover the cost of providing recreation services to the public. Use graduated fee schedules where feasible to make allowances for residents with limited incomes. ^{810.13}

Policy PROS-2.2.10: Fiscal Impact of Park Improvements

Evaluate proposed park facilities to determine their ability to generate revenue and help recover operational and maintenance costs. When developing new facilities, assess the projected operation and maintenance costs prior to requesting capital funding approval. ^{810.14}

Action PROS-2.2.A: Facility Assessments

Conduct regular facility condition and utilization studies and use this data to determine if there is a need for improvement, reconstruction, closure, or expansion. A comprehensive facility condition assessment should be performed for each recreation center at least once every five years. ^{810.15}

Action PROS-2.2.B: Maintenance Standards

Create official maintenance standards to improve the effectiveness of current maintenance and service levels for recreational buildings, facilities, and landscaping. Require adherence to these standards by maintenance contractors, as well as the District itself. ^{810.16}

Action PROS-2.2.C: Adopt-A-Park

Encourage community groups, businesses, and others to participate in the District's Adopt A Park/Adopt a Playground program and publicize the program through signs, advertisements, websites, and other media. ^{810.17}

Action PROS-2.2.D: Data Tracking

Implement computer tracking of data on facility use, costs, and revenues to make more informed decisions and to guide policies on fees, fee waivers, scheduling, and other aspects of facility programming. ^{810.18}

Action PROS-2.2.E: Marketing and Branding

Implement a unified marketing strategy to raise awareness of the variety of the District's recreational program offerings and to more firmly establish an identity for the District of Columbia Parks. This strategy should use advertisements, web-based information and promotions, radio and television, branding, and other means to raise the profile of District parks. ^{810.19}

See also policies in the Environmental Protection Element about "green" maintenance and green building practices, including requirements that future recreation centers meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver standards.



Langston Golf Course is part of an open space network that spans both banks of the Anacostia River

PROS-3 Open Space Networks ⁸¹¹

The District of Columbia is characterized by four outstanding and distinct networks of open space:

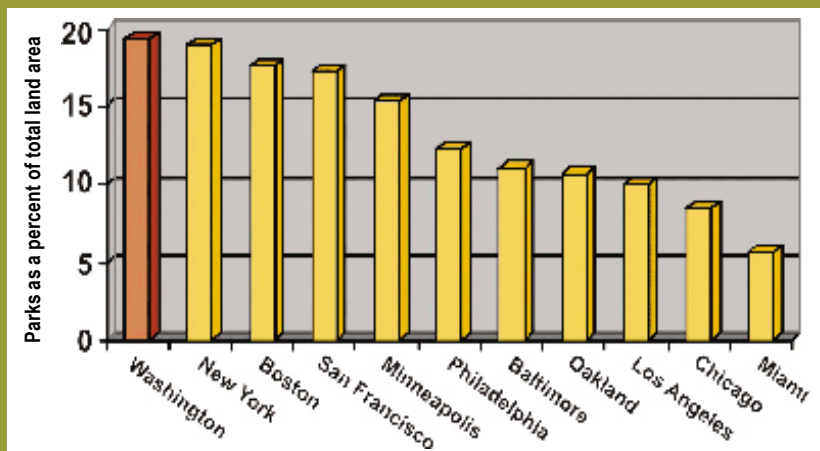
- The Monumental Core, including the National Mall and adjacent areas in East and West Potomac Parks
- Rock Creek Park and the linear parks along its tributary streams, extending from the Potomac River to the Maryland border
- The Fort Circle Parks, forming a "ring" of open space approximately five miles out from the city center
- The Anacostia and Potomac parklands, including linear parks along tributary streams. ^{811.1}

Each of these areas is profiled in more detail below. Together, they comprise 6,700 acres of parkland, or about 18 percent of the city's land area. Because almost all of this land is under the control of the National Park Service, the policies presented here are intended to express the District's aspirations for their long term management. They are statements of the District's values and priorities, to be consulted by our federal partners as they plan and manage these important properties. ^{811.2}

In addition to the four open space networks described above, there are other important "chains" of interconnected open space across the city. Among the most significant is the corridor of District, federal, and institutional lands extending from McMillan Reservoir on the south to Fort Totten on the north. ^{811.3}

Figure 8.2:

Parkland Open Space, DC Compared to Other Cities ^{811.6}



Source: OP, 2006

The District ranks first among the 11 cities shown in terms of parkland acreage as a percent of total land area. Despite the apparent abundance of parkland, however, this resource is not evenly distributed across the city. Many residents still lack access to parks and natural areas.

This section of the Comprehensive Plan also includes a special focus on park and open space planning for Washington's waterfronts. The need to improve connectivity between our open spaces through trails and greenways also is addressed. Policies on these topics are supplemented in Section PROS-4.0 with a discussion on "functional" open spaces that may augment this network, further contributing to community needs, environmental quality, and economic value. ^{811.4}

Figure 8.2 compares the total parkland acreage within the District of Columbia to other high density US cities, using data from a recent analysis by the Trust for Public Land. ^{811.5}

PROS-3.1 Sustaining and Enhancing the Federal Open Space Systems ⁸¹²

The National Mall and Environs

Although the District of Columbia does not have jurisdiction over the National Mall and the adjoining open spaces in East and West Potomac Parks, these are arguably the most visible and high profile parklands in the city. They project the image of Washington to the world and attract millions of visitors each year. The future of the landscaped glades between the US Capitol and the Potomac River is the focus of national debate as the need for new monuments and memorials is balanced against the need to retain the Mall's historic form, sight lines, and open quality. The Mall serves both the local community and the national community. It is integral to Washington's history. The National Capital Planning Commission has prepared several important plans on these issues, including the Legacy Plan and the Museums and Memorials Master Plan. Both plans seek to preserve the historic proportions of the Mall, recognize its multiple functions as a passive and active open space, and expand the open space network to new areas along South Capitol Street and the Anacostia River. ^{812.1}

Several planning initiatives for the National Mall have been completed or are underway. In 2000, the National Park Service completed a Comprehensive Design Plan for the White House and President's Park. The approved plan

provides the management framework and flexibility needed to manage and protect the site for the presidency, and the public. In addition, in 2004, the non-profit organization National Coalition to Save Our Mall launched the National Mall Third Century Initiative (3C Initiative). The mission of the 3C Initiative is to renew the vitality of the Mall through creative public use, wise stewardship for the next century, and appropriate expansion. The National Park Service, as managers of the National Mall, will be preparing a plan for its future over the next three years. The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts is also involved in planning and design decisions on the Mall. ^{812.2}

While all of these initiatives are critical, they have yet to provide a shared long-range vision for the multiple open spaces of the monumental core. An overall coordinated plan that looks at the future of this open space network, addressing issues such as transportation and Mall expansion, is still needed. ^{812.3}

Rock Creek Park

Rock Creek Park is the largest contiguous open space within the District, encompassing over 2,000 acres along the Rock Creek Valley and its tributary streams. The park's scenic landscapes provide a respite from the cityscape of Washington. Each year, more than two million people visit the park to hike, picnic, play, and enjoy its rugged beauty. More than 12 million people a year use the park roads for commuting or scenic driving. In 2005, the National Park Service completed a General Management Plan for the largest unit of Rock Creek Park, providing guidance on how to best protect natural resources and manage visitor services. The goals of the GMP are to preserve and perpetuate the ecology of the Rock Creek Valley, protect archaeological and historic resources, provide for education and exploration, and create opportunities for recreation that are compatible with the park's natural and cultural setting. The GMP itself includes management "prescriptions" that will guide future land use decisions and issues regarding road closures and traffic management. ^{812.4}

The Fort Circle Parks

At the start of the Civil War in 1861, a series of fortifications was built around Washington to protect the nation's capital from a Confederate invasion. Among the fortifications were Fort Stevens—site of an 1864 battle; Fort Reno—the highest point in the District of Columbia; and Fort Dupont—the largest park east of the Anacostia River. After the Civil War, most of the 68 forts and 93 batteries were dismantled and the land was returned to its pre-war owners. Before they disappeared completely, a number of fort sites were purchased by the federal government and developed as parkland. An envisioned Fort Circle greenbelt featured prominently in the McMillan Plan of 1901, and with the advent of the automobile was proposed for a 23-mile circumferential parkway around the growing city (the Fort Drive). ^{812.5}



The future of the landscaped glades between the US Capitol and the Potomac River is the focus of national debate as the need for new monuments and memorials is balanced against the need to retain the Mall's historic form, sight lines, and open quality.

The National Park Service prepared a General Management Plan (GMP) for the Fort Circle Parks in 2003. The GMP's primary objectives include protection of ecological and historical values while accommodating local recreational interests. The GMP seeks to remedy issues such as the deteriorated state of the parks' historical earthworks, concerns about visitor safety, and the lack of visitor services and interpretive facilities. Among the planned improvements are a new hiking trail linking the forts through existing parkland, new recreational features, coordinated signage, and new public access points. ^{812.6}

The Potomac and Anacostia Parklands

The two rivers and their associated tributaries such as Watts Branch and Pope Branch provide an important link in the District's open space network. They provide protection for sensitive natural habitat, scenic beauty, and water-oriented recreation for District residents and visitors. Washington's waterfront open spaces actually encompass an area larger than all of Rock Creek Park. However, a lack of continuity between the waterfront parks hinders their ability to function as an open space "network". Many of the parks are disconnected or are cut off from one another by highways, railroads, industry, and other barriers. As part of the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative Plan, a riverwalk linking the individual Anacostia Parks into a system has been proposed and partially funded. There is also pending federal legislation that would transfer key waterfront open space lands from the federal to District governments. ^{812.7}

Policies for the waterfront are presented in the Section 3.2 of this Element. ^{812.8}

Policy PROS-3.1.1: Monumental Core

Preserve the integrity of the National Mall open space, and advocate for federal plans and programs that protect this area from inappropriate or excessive development. ^{812.9}

Policy PROS-3.1.2: East and West Potomac Parks

Work with the federal government to protect and enhance the great open spaces of the monumental core beyond the National Mall, such as Hains Point and the Tidal Basin parklands. Consistent with the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan, support the use of these areas for outdoor cultural events and celebrations, and for recreational activities and amenities that serve District residents and visitors. Planning for these areas should provide opportunities to expand the National Mall and better integrate East Potomac Park with the Southwest Waterfront across the Washington Channel. ^{812.10}

Policy PROS-3.1.3: Rock Creek Park

Ensure that the District's land use and transportation decisions support the conservation of Rock Creek Park as a national scenic resource. Actively

participate in discussions about the management of park resources, including roadways, recreational facilities, and environmental quality. ^{812.11}

Policy PROS-3.1.4: Tributary Parks

Maintain the scenic open space qualities and ecology of the city's stream valley parks, including tributaries to the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers as well as tributaries to Rock Creek. Ensure that development adjacent to stream valley corridor parks does not compromise visual and ecological values and access to natural and forested areas. ^{812.12}

See the Environmental Protection Element for additional policies on stream protection.

Policy PROS-3.1.5: Fort Circle Parks

Protect and enhance the Fort Circle Parks as an integrated network of permanent open spaces that connect neighborhoods, provide scenic beauty and historic interest, and offer a variety of recreational activities. Recognize these parks as an important city and national resource. Prevent District and federal actions that would harm historic and ecological resources in the Fort Circle Parks, and strongly support actions that would improve their maintenance, connectivity, visibility, accessibility, and safety. ^{812.13}

Policy PROS-3.1.6: Compatibility with Parklands

Maintain and design public and private development adjacent to the edges of open spaces and parks to be compatible with these parklands and improve park access and safety. ^{812.14}

Action PROS-3.1.A: Participation in Federal Planning Park Efforts

Support and participate in National Park Service efforts to update the 1976 Master Plan for the National Mall, NCPC's upcoming National Capital Framework Plan, and other federal initiatives to plan for the Mall in the 21st Century. Encourage citizen participation in these efforts. ^{812.15}

Action PROS-3.1.B: Monument and Memorial Siting

Actively participate with the appropriate federal agencies, commissions, and others in discussions and decisions on the siting of new monuments, memorials, and other commemorative works on open spaces within the District of Columbia. ^{812.16}

Action PROS-3.1.C: Implementation of General Management Plans

Support federal efforts to implement the Comprehensive Design Plan for the White House and President's Park and the General Management Plans for Rock Creek Park and the Fort Circle Parks (Civil War Defenses of Washington). ^{812.17}

Action PROS-3.1.D: Fort Circle Park Trail

Use land acquisition and/or easements to complete the Fort Circle Park Trail; and to provide additional Fort Circle Park signage and historic markers. ^{812.18}

Action PROS-3.1.E: Fort Circle Partnerships

Actively participate in interjurisdictional and public/private partnerships to protect, enhance, restore and complete the Fort Circle Parks. ^{812.19}

Action PROS-3.1.F: Park Land Transfers

In cooperation with appropriate federal agencies, identify park resources in federal ownership that could potentially be transferred to the District, such as Meridian Hill Park. ^{812.20}

PROS-3.2 Reclaiming the Waterfront ⁸¹³

The contrast between the city's two waterfronts—the Potomac and the Anacostia—has been well documented. Virtually the entire Potomac shoreline north of Hains Point is publicly accessible, with such amenities as the C&O Canal towpath, Georgetown Waterfront Park, Thompson's Boathouse, and Theodore Roosevelt Island. The shoreline affords stunning views of the city's monuments and picturesque vistas across the river to Virginia. On the other hand, much of the 22 miles of shoreline along the Anacostia River is underutilized, unattractive, and inaccessible. ^{813.1}

Along the Potomac, the District's priority is conserving the federal parklands, retaining public access, and improving access where it does not exist today. Along the Anacostia, the priority is to link more than a dozen disconnected open spaces to create a unified system of first-class parks, and to connect these parks to the neighborhoods they adjoin. Figure 8.3 provides an overview of park recommendations for the Anacostia waterfront. The Area Elements should be consulted for additional detail. ^{813.2}

Policy PROS-3.2.1: Protecting Waterfront Open Space

Recognize the importance of the city's waterfronts for recreation, public access, ecological protection, and scenic beauty. ^{813.3}

Policy PROS-3.2.2: Connecting Neighborhoods to the Rivers

Develop open space linkages between the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers and adjacent neighborhoods, using stream tributaries such as Watts Branch and Pope Branch as a framework for linear parks between the shoreline and nearby residential areas. ^{813.4}

Policy PROS-3.2.3: Linkages Between the Waterfront and Nearby Neighborhoods

Establish stronger linkages between the waterfront and adjacent upland neighborhoods including Deanwood, Mayfair, Kenilworth-Parkside, River Terrace, Fairlawn, Twining, Kenilworth, Historic Anacostia, Carver-Langston, Kingman Park, Hill East, Capitol Hill, Barney Circle, and Southwest. Maximize public access to the waterfront from these areas through the development of a riverwalk and shoreline trail, improved public

Figure 8.3:

Overview of Proposed Anacostia Waterfront Park Recommendations

813.5



Source: OP, 2003

The District's Anacostia Waterfront Initiative calls for a unified identity for more than 1,800 acres along the Anacostia River, including 100 acres of additional parks, many new community access points, and expanded waterfront recreational facilities. The Initiative also includes plans for a continuous riverfront trail, public access to the shoreline within new neighborhoods, interpretive nature and boating facilities, and pedestrian and bicycle bridges to better link the east and west sides of the River. The dark green areas in this figure indicate park areas to be added or enhanced, and the dashed line indicates a network of planned (or existing) hiking and biking trails.

“Programmed open spaces should also include innovative learning and play spaces in natural settings such as woodlands, meadows, streams and riverbanks.”

— SUGGESTION FROM
A PARTICIPANT IN A
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
MEETING.

8

transportation, redesigned bridges and freeways, and the extension of neighborhood streets and avenues to the water’s edge. ^{813.6}

Policy PROS-3.2.4: Waterfront Visibility and Accessibility

Improve access to the shoreline parks from across the city, and reduce barriers to waterfront access created by railroads, freeways, and non-water dependent industrial uses. However, no freeway or highway removal shall be undertaken prior to the completion of an adequate and feasible alternative traffic plan that has been approved by the District government. ^{813.7}

Policy PROS-3.2.5: Water-Oriented Recreation

Provide for a variety of water-oriented activities, including fishing and boating, on the District’s rivers. Recognize both the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers as vital aquatic resources than can accommodate kayaking, canoeing, sculling, fishing, and other forms of water-oriented recreation. ^{813.8}

Policy PROS-3.2.6: Shoreline Access

On waterfront development sites under District jurisdiction, require public access to the shoreline unless precluded by safety or security considerations. ^{813.9}

Policy PROS-3.2.7: Waterfront Park Design

Require the design and planning of waterfront parks to maximize the scenic and recreational value of the rivers. Activities such as parking lots and park maintenance facilities should be located away from the water’s edge, and environmentally sensitive resources should be protected. ^{813.10}

Policy PROS-3.2.8: Upper Potomac Waterfront

Partner with the National Park Service and other federal agencies to conserve open space along the Potomac waterfront and to protect the wooded and scenic qualities of the Potomac Palisades and adjacent islands and shoreline, including the creation of the Georgetown Waterfront Park. ^{813.11}

Policy PROS-3.2.9: Lower Potomac Waterfront

Support additional public access to the Potomac waterfront from the mouth of the Anacostia River southward. While general access is currently restricted due to existing uses (such as Bolling Air Force Base), the District should identify long-term opportunities for shoreline open space and recreation, in the event that federal needs and use of this land change. ^{813.12}

See also the Urban Design Element for additional policies and actions related to shoreline development and aesthetics and the Lower Anacostia Waterfront/Near Southwest Element for additional discussion of the planned shoreline parks.

Action PROS-3.2.A: Anacostia River Park Improvements

Work collaboratively with the federal government, the private sector, community and non-profit groups, and the Anacostia Waterfront

Corporation to implement the open space improvement plans of the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative. Planned improvements include:

- a. A major destination park at Poplar Point;
- b. Restored natural areas at Kingman and Heritage Islands;
- c. New parks around RFK stadium;
- d. Continuous bicycle and pedestrian trails along the waterfront and new pedestrian crossings on the upper reaches of the river;
- e. New neighborhood parks and athletic fields within redeveloping areas along the waterfront, including the Southwest waterfront, Near Southeast, and Hill East; and
- f. Enhancements to the existing waterfront parks. ^{813.13}

For more details on these planned parks, see the Lower Anacostia Waterfront/Near Southwest Area Element and the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative Framework Plan.

Action PROS-3.2.B: Signage and Branding

Work with the National Park Service to develop and implement a consistent system of signage and markers for the Anacostia and Potomac waterfronts. ^{813.14}

Action PROS-3.2.C: Anacostia River Boating

Develop additional marine facilities, including rowing centers, appropriately-scaled boathouses, boat slips, and piers along the banks of the Anacostia River as recommended in the AWI Framework Plan. ^{813.15}

PROS-3.3 Other Significant Open Space Networks ⁸¹⁴

The District's formal open space networks are complemented by several smaller open space systems. These networks may be lesser known due to fragmented ownership and multiple functions, but they are no less important—particularly to the communities they serve. ^{814.1}

A unique open space network comprised primarily of major federal facilities, cemeteries, and institutional uses is located just north of the city's geographic center, in an area otherwise lacking in public parkland. The network includes McMillan Reservoir, the Armed Forces Retirement Home, Rock Creek Church Cemetery, National Cemetery, and Glenwood, Prospect Hill, and St. Mary's Cemeteries. This area was already established as a major recreational ground for Washington in the 19th century. Its role as such was confirmed by the 1901 McMillan Plan, which recognized the dual function of these lands as functional facilities and passive open spaces. While public access to many of these properties is restricted today, their presence as an open space corridor is plainly visible on aerial photos of the city. ^{814.2}



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The Fort Circle Trail, which runs from Fort Dupont to Watts Branch, is slated to be upgraded

Several sites in the McMillan to Fort Totten open space network are currently under consideration for development. As detailed plans are developed for these sites, the District must take an active role in conserving the connected open space network as an historic, ecological, aesthetic, and recreational resource. ^{814.3}

Continued enhancement and preservation of open space networks in other parts of the city is also called for. These networks include the forested greenbelt along Oxon Run, the woodlands and wetlands around Oxon Cove (extending south into Maryland), and the wooded areas extending from Westmoreland Circle to the Potomac River (including Dalecarlia Reservoir). ^{814.4}

Policy PROS-3.3.1: North-Central Open Space Network

Protect and enhance the historic open space network extending from McMillan Reservoir to Fort Totten. As future land use changes in this area take place, an integrated system of permanent open spaces and improved parks should be maintained or created. ^{814.5}

Policy PROS-3.3.2: Other Open Space Networks

Recognize the recreational, scenic, environmental, and historic value of other interconnected or linear open spaces in the city, including Oxon Run, Oxon Cove, and the Dalecarlia Reservoir area. ^{814.6}

Action PROS-3.3.A: Creating “Washington Central Park”

Work with the federal government, NCRC, and institutional and open space landowners to create a linear system of parks and open space extending from Bryant Street on the south to Fort Totten on the north. This system should be created from existing large publicly-owned and institutional tracts, as well as adjacent triangle parks, cemeteries, and rights-of-way. ^{814.7}

See the Rock Creek East and Mid-City Area Elements for additional information on this network.

PROS-3.4 Connecting the City Through Trails ⁸¹⁵

Trails and linear parks are an important part of the open space network. They link the District’s open spaces to one another and provide access between neighborhoods and nature. In some cases, they provide stream buffers or visual edges within communities. There are many different kinds of trails, serving a range of recreational and transportation functions. Recent trail planning efforts have focused on improving bicycle mobility, and waterfront access, and showcasing the city’s cultural, historic, and scenic resources. ^{815.1}

Key trail-building initiatives include the Anacostia Riverwalk and Fort Circle Parks Hiking Trail (both referenced in the previous section), the Metropolitan Branch Trail between Union Station and Silver Spring, the Watts Branch Trail, the Georgetown Waterfront Trail, and the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail Plan (PHNST). The PHNST is of particular interest, as it is one of the

country's 22 scenic national trails and includes multiple strands extending from the Chesapeake Bay to western Pennsylvania. Several of these strands pass through the District of Columbia. ^{815.2}

In 2005, the District adopted an updated Bicycle Master Plan, including recommendations for improving bike routes and completing bike trails and bridges across the city. Among the key recommendations are eliminating gaps in the trail network, improving access along the Anacostia River, and linking the District's trails to a larger regional network. The Bicycle Plan also recommends coordination with the National Park Service to improve off-road trails like those traversing the National Mall, Rock Creek Park, Watts Branch, and Oxon Run (see Table 8.2). Additional details on the Bicycle Plan may be found in the Transportation Element of this Comprehensive Plan. ^{815.3}



The Bicycle Master Plan recommends coordination with the National Park Service to improve off-road trails like those traversing the National Mall, Rock Creek Park, Watts Branch, and Oxon Run.

Table 8.2:

Trail Improvements Recommended by the DC Bicycle Master Plan ^{815.4}

Trails to be Upgraded or Extended	Gaps to be Eliminated through New Trail Construction
National Mall (shared use paths)	Historic Anacostia light rail line trail
Mount Vernon Trail	Capital Crescent to Rock Creek Trail connection
Rock Creek Trail	South Capitol Street to Oxon Cove connection
Suitland Parkway Trail	New York Av Corridor Trail (Mt. Vernon Sq to MD)
Watts Branch Trail	Kennedy Center to Roosevelt Bridge
Oxon Run Trail	Military Road crossing of Rock Creek Park
Fort Circle Trail (Fort Dupont to Watts Branch)	Kenilworth Park to Arboretum
Piney Branch trail spur	Massachusetts Av Bridge
M Street SE trail spur to the Anacostia River	Beach Drive in Upper Rock Creek Park
Dalecarlia Parkway shared use path	Fort Circle Park Hiking Trail

Source: DC Bicycle Master Plan, 2005

Policy PROS-3.4.1: Trail Network

Develop a network of trails, paths, and linear parks to link the District's open space areas and improve access to open space. Trails and paths should provide a safe and convenient way for residents to experience Washington's scenery and natural beauty on foot or by bicycle. ^{815.5}

Policy PROS-3.4.2: Linear Park Connections

Work with the federal government to improve connections between the open spaces within the District of Columbia through land acquisition and park dedication, particularly where “gaps” in the city’s open space network exist. Attention should be given to acquisitions that better connect the Fort Circle Parks and improve shoreline access. ^{815.6}

Policy PROS-3.4.3: Protecting Natural Features

Protect the scenic qualities of trails and the parklands they traverse. This includes designing trails to reduce erosion and tree removal, and protecting the integrity of the settings that make each trail unique. ^{815.7}

Policy PROS-3.4.4: Trails in Underutilized Rights-Of-Way

Develop multi-use trails in underutilized rights of way, including surplus railroad corridors and undeveloped street rights of way. ^{815.8}

Policy PROS-3.4.5: Trail Dedication

Require trail dedication as appropriate on privately-owned development sites along the District’s streams, waterfronts, and linear parks. ^{815.9}

Action PROS-3.4.A: Bicycle Master Plan Implementation

Initiate focused trail planning and construction efforts to eliminate gaps in the bicycle trail network and to improve substandard trails, as itemized in the District’s Bicycle Master Plan. Coordinate with the National Park Service for trails where both DDOT and NPS have responsibility. ^{815.10}

Action PROS-3.4.B: Signage

Provide more consistent and unified signage along the city’s trails to improve their identity and accessibility. ^{815.11}

Action PROS-3.4.C: Water Trails

Develop designated “water trails” and water access points in the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers for travel by canoe, kayak, and other paddlecraft. ^{815.12}

PROS-4 Maximizing Our Assets ⁸¹⁶

The government of the District of Columbia has neither the land nor the dollars to completely meet the recreational needs of its residents. Through collaboration and partnerships, community resources can be leveraged to dramatically improve access to open space and recreational services. Agreements with the federal government, public and private schools, local colleges and universities, and the District’s major employers are an important part of the city’s efforts to broaden recreational choices for all residents. ^{816.1}

Maximizing our assets also means redefining “open space” to include more than just parkland. Broadly defined, open space includes cemeteries, golf courses, reservoirs, institutions, parkways, military bases, and even private lawns and backyards. In this context, the value of open space may be its contribution to the city’s form rather than its use for recreation. Preserving a balance between development and open space is important in all District neighborhoods and essential to the health of the community. Similarly, provisions for high-quality open space in new development—including amenities such as balconies, courtyards, and landscaping—is important to the psychological well-being of future residents and the aesthetic qualities of the city. ^{816.2}

PROS-4.1 Maximizing Access Through Partnerships ⁸¹⁷

The need for joint planning to coordinate federal and District open space planning has been mentioned throughout this Element. In 2005, the District, the National Park Service, and the National Capital Planning Commission launched the CapitalSpace Initiative to increase access to green space for District residents and visitors (see text box). Its particular focus is on improving access to parks in neighborhoods where they are in short supply, such as Central and Northeast DC. Similar joint planning and design exercises should be pursued with the District’s Public Schools, and with other local governments in the region. ^{817.1}

Non-profit service providers also provide recreational facilities and programs for District residents. Groups like the United Planning Organization, Friendship House Association, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and the YMCA/YWCA fill gaps in local recreational services as they pursue their missions to foster the spiritual, mental, and physical development of individuals, families, and communities. Local colleges and universities also provide athletic programs and community services, many for free or at greatly reduced costs. These entities should not be viewed as competitors to the District’s own Department of Parks and Recreation, but rather as partners that can help increase recreational access for all. ^{817.3}

Capital Space ^{817.2}

Almost 20 percent of Washington, D.C.’s land area is devoted to parks and open spaces, ranging from the formal circles and squares established by the L’Enfant Plan to neighborhood “pocket parks”, large forested stream valley corridors, recreational centers, and waterfront parks. Planning, ownership and management of these different areas is provided by different branches of the District government, the federal government, and occasionally, non-profit organizations.

The D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, the National Capital Planning Commission, the D.C. Office of Planning, and the National Park Service have joined together in a new initiative, CapitalSpace, to establish a shared planning framework to address all of the parks and open spaces within the District.

CapitalSpace is an opportunity to achieve a seamless system of high quality parks and open spaces meeting both national and local needs; addressing the often-competing demands placed on these spaces and clarifying their appropriate uses; ensuring that established and new neighborhoods have access to adequate parkland; and developing strategies to best use scarce resources to design, program, and maintain parks and open spaces to the highest possible standards.



Open spaces such as Congressional Cemetery—while not public parks—serve as important open space assets, particularly where conventional parks are in short supply.

Policy PROS-4.1.1: National Park Service Partnerships

Promote expanded partnerships with the National Park Service and other District agencies to broaden the range of recreational opportunities available to District residents. ^{817.4}

Policy PROS-4.1.2: Joint Planning and Management Strategies

Develop joint planning and management strategies for all parks where the District of Columbia and National Park Service have overlapping responsibilities. Use coordinated standards for lighting, fencing, walkways, maintenance, and security in these areas. ^{817.5}

Policy PROS-4.1.3: Greener, More Accessible Schoolyards

Work with the District of Columbia Public Schools to improve the appearance and usefulness of schoolyards and outdoor recreational facilities such as playgrounds and athletic fields. Strive to make such areas more “park-like” in character, especially in communities without access to District-operated parks. ^{817.6}

See the Educational Facilities Element for policies on joint use agreements between the District Government and DC Public Schools.

Policy PROS-4.1.4: Non-Profit Recreational Facilities

Support the development of non-profit recreational facilities, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, to meet the recreational needs of District residents and complement the facilities provided by the District. ^{817.7}

Policy PROS-4.1.5: Regional Open Space Planning

Support federal, interstate and multi-jurisdictional efforts to preserve open space and create interconnected greenbelts and hiking trails within and around the Washington region. ^{817.8}

Action PROS-4.1.A: Capital Space

Complete the Capital Space Initiative, which will provide a coordinated strategy for open space and park management between the District and federal governments. ^{817.9}

Action PROS-4.1.B: Expanding Partnerships

Develop a comprehensive list of current parks and recreation partnerships, including detailed information on the scope and responsibilities of partnership agreements. Prepare a marketing plan aimed at solidifying new partnerships with universities, museums, professional sports teams, churches, and philanthropic groups. ^{817.10}

Action PROS-4.1.C: Sponsorships and Foundations

Explore opportunities for financial sponsorship of park and recreation facilities by corporate and non-profit partners, foundations, and “friends” organizations. ^{817.11}

PROS-4.2 Recognizing the Value of Functional Open Space ⁸¹⁸

Functional open space refers to undeveloped land used for purposes other than parks and conservation. Such space comprises hundreds of acres of public and private land in the District, including sites that are valued for their large trees, scenic vistas, and natural beauty. Some of these sites are regarded as public amenities, with features like hiking trails and lawns for picnics and other forms of recreation. Such spaces are particularly important in neighborhoods like Brookland, where conventional parks are in short supply. There and elsewhere in the District, the grounds of seminaries, hospitals, and cemeteries are informally serving some of the functions usually associated with a neighborhood park. ^{818.1}

Retaining public access to these assets is important to the well-being of surrounding neighborhoods. Even where public access is not possible, the role of these spaces in improving the physical environment and shaping the visual quality of our neighborhoods should be acknowledged. ^{818.2}

Policy PROS-4.2.1: Institutional Open Space

Encourage local institutions, such as private and parochial schools, colleges and universities, seminaries, hospitals, and churches and cemeteries, to allow the cooperative use of their open space lands for the benefit of District residents. ^{818.3}

Policy PROS-4.2.2: Utility Open Space

Recognize the value of undeveloped land associated with utilities, reservoirs, and other infrastructure facilities in providing visual buffers for adjacent neighborhoods and opportunities for recreational trails. ^{818.4}

Policy PROS-4.2.3: Parkways and Medians

Enhance the visual and open space qualities of Washington’s streets and highways through the landscaping of medians, traffic islands, and rights of way. ^{818.5}

Policy PROS-4.2.4: Freeway Joint Use

Where compatible with adjacent land uses, support the use of land under or adjacent to freeways or other limited access roadways for passive open space, public art, or other uses which enhance the usefulness and appearance of such land. ^{818.6}



Podium parks use the air rights of below grade roadways to provide parks and plazas.

Policy PROS-4.2.5: Podium Parks

Consider the development of “podium” type open spaces and parks in the air rights over below-grade freeways, including the I-395 Freeway through Downtown DC, and the Southeast-Southwest Freeway near Capitol Hill. ^{818.7}

Action PROS-4.2.A: Zoning Assessment of Institutional Land

Conduct a study of institutional land in the city to determine the appropriateness of existing zoning designations, given the extent of open space on each site. Among other things, this study should assess how current zoning policies, including large tract review, planned unit developments, and campus plans, work to protect open space. Recommend zoning changes as appropriate to conserve open space and avoid incompatible building or redevelopment on such sites. This study should include a “best practices” assessment of how other cities around the country achieve the goal of conserving functional open space without impairing economic growth or reducing development rights. ^{818.8}

PROS-4.3 Open Space and the Cityscape ⁸¹⁹

Improving open space is part of the District’s broader vision of “building green and healthy communities.” The following policies seek to increase the amount of open space in the city and protect open space where it exists today. Although these spaces are often small, they collectively make an important contribution to the livability of the city. ^{819.1}

The District’s Zoning Regulations currently require “residential recreation space” when multi-family housing is developed in commercial zones. Depending on the zone district, up to 20 percent of a building’s floor area may be required to be set aside as residential recreation space, including rooftops, courtyards, and indoor recreational facilities. Additional zoning provisions seek to retain open space by setting lot coverage limits, and front and side yard requirements. The maximum area that may be covered by structures varies from 40 percent to 75 percent in residential zones and from 60 to 100 percent in commercial zones. “Creation or preservation of open space” is also defined as a public benefit or public amenity for the purpose of granting additional density in a planned unit development. ^{819.2}

Policy PROS-4.3.1: Open Space in the Downtown Landscape

Sustain a high quality network of downtown pocket parks, courtyards, arcades, plazas, and rooftop gardens that provide space for recreation, scenic beauty, and outdoor activities for workers, visitors, and residents. ^{819.3}

Policy PROS-4.3.2: Plazas in Commercial Districts

Encourage the development of outdoor plazas around Metro station entrances, in neighborhood business districts, around civic buildings, and in other areas with high volumes of pedestrian activity. Use the planned unit development process to promote such spaces for public benefit and to encourage tree planting, public art, sculpture, seating areas, and other amenities within such spaces. ^{819.4}

Policy PROS-4.3.3: Common Open Space in New Development

Provide incentives for new and rehabilitated buildings to include “green roofs”, rain gardens, landscaped open areas, and other common open space areas that provide visual relief and aesthetic balance. ^{819.5}

Policy PROS-4.3.4: Protection of Open Space in Multi-Family Development

Recognize the implicit value of the lawns, courtyards, gardens, and other open areas that surround many of the District’s older high- and medium-density residential buildings. Discourage the practice of building on these areas if the historic proportions and character of the original buildings would be compromised. ^{819.6}

Policy PROS-4.3.5: Residential Yards

Recognize the value of residential yards as a component of the city’s open space system and discourage increased coverage of such areas by buildings and impervious surfaces. ^{819.7}

Action PROS-4.3.A: Residential Recreation Space and Lot Coverage Requirements

Complete an evaluation of DC Zoning requirements for “residential recreation space” and “lot coverage.” Explore the feasibility of requiring residential recreation space in high-density residential zones as well as commercial zones, and establishing specific conditions for lowering or waiving the requirements. Consider a sliding scale for lot coverage requirements which considers parcel size as well as zone district. Incentives for the creation of parkland, including increases in allowable density where parkland is provided, also should be considered. ^{819.8}